

My name is Bruce Lancaster, and it is indeed an honor and privilege to be in this pulpit, knowing what I do of the history of this church – its reputation for ministry and service, for its leadership and mission to the community, to our denomination, and into the world.

I am here to serve as your interim pastor, or as some have begun to identify this particular kind of ministry as a ministry of transitions – as churches move from one chapter in their history to another, to help turn the page, even to create a new volume.

As in the case of this congregation, for nearly 200 years and all the ministers who have served here; these ministries are not just a few chapters, these are volumes of faithful service and caring ministry.

Truly I consider it an honor to serve as that bridge of ministry to the minister who will build on that rich tradition.

Let me get one thing out of the way right now – There will come a time during the search process when someone will come up and ask me, “How much longer until we get our real minister?”

Well, for one thing, I am a “real” minister! But I don’t take offense at that! I do understand, time is on everybody’s mind when it comes to seeking a new pastor.

I will tell you this now, and when it comes time for a Pastor Nominating Committee to begin its work, I will remind them: Success is not measured by how quickly a minister is called; success is measured by how the time is well spent in calling the minister God has chosen.

I’ll say that again: Success is not measured by how quickly a minister is called; success is measured by how the time is well spent in calling the minister God has chosen.

It is all about time – and I know that one of the questions you probably have is: “Are we going to get out on time today?”

One church I served put a clock in the balcony – the problem, they said, was once they put the clock up there, the minister never looked at the balcony again!

But it’s more than just worship ending ‘on time’ – time is ever an issue with us – my own ministry with you is about the in-between time – and how many of us talk about not having enough time, trying to save time or find the time, how much time do I have, it’s time to go, where did the time go?, been waiting a long time, time’s running out, or as the old hymn says, “time like an ever flowing stream soon bears us all away” – life is time.

And, yes, the question comes from the song by the rock group Chicago - I show my age, I got to hear them at the New Orleans Pop Festival some 40+ years ago when they sang their hit song, “Does Anybody Really Know What Time It Is?”

But long before Chicago had a hit song with it, it’s the question that Luke is underlining in our gospel lesson.

For Luke, he is emphasizing to his readers that the gospel message is about a real person, Jesus, in real time – This is not some ‘once upon a time’ story.

If Luke were writing today, this is how our scripture would go: this is the time of the 8th year of President Barack Obama, when Nathan Deal is Governor and Nancy Denson is Mayor – that’s the real time we live in here in Athens and the gospel message is still just as real now as it was then - real people, real time.

And we, too, are called to fulfill God’s purpose in the time we have – life is time that matters -

Remember that the first act of creation was the creation of time, the first day. In Psalm 90, which is listed as a "Prayer of Moses", Moses speaks for us when he says: ***Teach us to count our days that we may gain a wise heart.***

What Luke is doing for the rest of his gospel and into his Acts of the Apostles - he challenges us to live out the answer to Moses' prayer to count our days, to make our day's count, to think about this real time in terms of the real presence of God's activity in our world in the person of Jesus Christ so that we can answer the question: Do you really know what time it is.

Which leads to the second part of the question from that Chicago song. Not only "Does anybody really know what time it is?" But also, "Does anybody really care?"

We all get so caught up in time, but does anybody really care enough – do you really care about the time God has for you – to spend your time caring about what God cares about?

Think about it this way: however, you tell time - clock, watch, phone - Is it digital or does it have a face?

If it's digital – it does answer the question: what time is it? But this factual, digital time, it's symbolic of the way we live: sound bites, fast food, programmed meals in the microwave, right now, moment after moment after moment, what time it is now, nothing more, nothing less – just the time it is.

But if your timepiece has a face, like this watch, it does answer the question of what time it is...AND MORE. For the way we tell time can be: 11:26 or 15 minutes til, or half past.

It's the face of time that allows us to see the present, but also acknowledge the past and look into the future, all at the same time –

Like this day, September 11, we look back and remember - a tragic time, a violent day, the exact moment of where we were on September 11.

But whatever the difficult times we find ourselves in, we are strengthened for the future as in this prayer of St. Brendan: *I will trust in the darkness and know that my times, even now, are in Your hand.*

That is the affirmation of Luke's gospel in our passage from the letter to the Ephesians: *God has made known to us the mystery of his will, according to his good pleasure that he set forth in Christ, as a plan for the fullness of time..."*

Not just what time it is, not just to teach us to count our days, but it's a matter of how we live in our time now and move forward into the time yet to come.

All of us are called to embrace the holiness of time: To know the presence of God, to live as the people of God, to fulfill God's purpose in the time we have.

I believe this is the underlying foundation for the great commandment – to love God with all your heart, soul, mind, and strength, to love your neighbors as yourself.

I've spent time with people in their last days, and I can tell you, not one has talked about job or house or money or anything like that – what they've talked about is how much they were loved and how much they loved others.

Do you really know what time it is? Time to experience the reality of Jesus Christ in the here and now.

Do you really care? Time to live fully in the fullness of time.

Many years ago, a man came to my office and told me about his 16-year-old granddaughter – she had just come home from rehab – not for drugs or alcohol, but from a nervous breakdown – the stress of school and activities and the social pressures had gotten to her.

He and his wife had just come home that weekend from seeing her, about a two-hour drive. She had stayed in her room for most of

their visit. Her parents said she was very tired, very sad.

But just before they left, she came down the stairs and asked if he would walk with her down the driveway.

He said, "We walked to the end, a slow walk, I talked some, she didn't say anything, just held onto my arm, about 100 yards there and back. And when we got in, she went back up to her room."

"Bruce," he said, "Soon after we got to our house, the phone rang, and it was my son, asking what had happened on that walk, what we had talked about.

"I told him, 'nothing, what's wrong?' He said, 'that's just it, nothing's wrong, it's just that just when we went up to her room after you left, she was smiling, the first time we've seen her smile in 6 months. And we know it's going to be OK.'"

And as the tears began to slide down his cheeks, he said, "I crashed my airplane over Holland in WWII and spent six weeks hiding from the Nazis before I made it safely back to England.

I've survived two heart attacks and a triple bypass. I've been in car wrecks, other accidents – but do you think – Do you think that God kept me alive through all of that just to make that walk that day?"

Yes, of course – all those days, all of that - to experience the holiness of time in the way that you care to use time.

So it is for you and for me, for all the days God has for us: To know the presence of God, to live as the people of God, to fulfill God's purpose in the time we have.

TO GOD BE THE GLORY.